Chapter 2
Migration and integration policy in Europe: Comparing Belgium and Sweden

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The events that followed the Arab Spring—the civil war in Syria, the rise of Islamic State, and the power struggle in Libya following the death of Gaddafi—were among the factors that triggered the largest refugee crisis since the Second World War. Other events such as the political crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the persecution of the Rohingya in Myanmar, and the exodus that resulted from Venezuela's economic collapse have since made matters even worse. As a result, some 68.5 million people worldwide have been on the move through no choice of their own according to the UNHCR's latest figures; 25.4 million of those are refugees and 3.1 million are asylum seekers. Currently, the largest numbers of refugees worldwide originate from Syria (6.3 million), Afghanistan (2.6 million), and South Sudan (2.4 million). While most people who flee war and persecution remain within their country's borders, a majority of asylum seekers and refugees —fugitives who had to cross a national border—move to neighboring countries. In relative terms, Lebanon is the country that hosts the largest number of refugees: one out of six inhabitants of this small eastern Mediterranean country is a refugee. With some 3.5 million refugees, Turkey is the number one host country of refugees in absolute terms (UNHCR, 2018).

While 85 percent of the world's displaced persons are located in developing countries, the West has not remained unaffected. As a consequence of armed conflicts, political and religious persecutions, and poverty, hundreds of thousands of refugees and economic migrants—including vulnerable groups such as minors, pregnant women, and disabled, diseased and elderly people—from the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia have attempted to reach Europe in recent years. This has led them on a long and deadly journey across land and sea. Starting in 2011 the numbers of asylum applicants in EU member states grew significantly, from 309,040 in 2011 to 1,322,844 in 2015, after which a gradual decline set in (Eurostat; Asylum statistics 2018).

In absolute terms Germany has been Europe's premier host country. In 2015 (the year with the highest number of asylum-seeker applications in the EU) it registered 476,508 asylum applications, which is more than a third of all applications in the EU that year. With respectively 177,134 and 162,451 asylum applications in 2015, Hungary and Sweden were the EU's number two and three host countries. In 2017, Germany remained the number one host country, while Hungary and Sweden became less attractive than Italy and France, among others (Eurostat, 2018).

Rising numbers of refugees in Europe have spurred diverging political responses from national governments, as member states are affected in different ways and the EU remains unable to come up with a coherent migration policy. Some countries have been openly welcoming of refugees, including Germany and the Nordic countries, especially Sweden. The political attitude toward refugees in these countries is mostly characterized by concerns for solidarity and responsibility and can be summarized by German chancellor Angela Merkel's words: "Wir schaffen das!" (We can do this!). Despite taking in and retaining relatively few refugees, Portugal might be described as even more liberal, as its government has actively tried to attract more refugees. This political attitude is in strong contrast with that of the Italian, Hungarian, Austrian, and Greek governments, for instance, who have attempted to cut down the numbers of asylum seekers flocking to their countries through measures such as the creation of hundreds of kilometers of fences on the EU's external frontiers, between Greece and Turkey or Hungary and Serbia, making it more difficult for asylum seekers to reach a safe haven and strengthening the notion of a 'Fortress Europe'. Walls have also gone up between EU member states, however, between Slovenia and Croatia, for instance, and even within the Schengen area, between Austria and Slovenia.

The rise of border fences and the temporary reinstatement of border controls within the Schengen area show that the refugee crisis has strongly divided the European member states, leading to a political crisis. As a majority of refugees enter the European Union through Italy (central Mediterranean route) and Greece (eastern Mediterranean route), these countries have felt the strongest migratory pressures under the Dublin Convention, which allocates responsibility for an asylum seeker to the country of entry, so that all other member states would be legally justified in sending most asylum seekers back to Italy and Greece. The Convention thus creates a huge imbalance in responsibilities between Northern and Southern European States. In order to reduce this migratory pressure on the latter, plans have been made by the European institutions to relocate refugees across the EU. This has been thwarted by Eastern EU member states—mostly Hungary, Slovakia,

and Poland—which added an East-West divide within the EU. In practice, the number of refugees who have been relocated has remained small owing to disagreements on quotas as well. Nevertheless, the number of resettled persons increased from 6,550 in 2014 to 24,155 in 2017 (Eurostat, 2018).

As the crisis deepened, support for accepting refugees declined everywhere in Europe, including in initially very welcoming countries such as Germany and Sweden. This is related to the election victories of nationalist and populist parties, who used the refugee crisis to their advantage. In Germany, for instance, the far-right AFD (Alternative für Deutschland) grew rapidly on the strength of its anti-refugee rhetoric, and so did the Sweden Democrats in Sweden, forcing governments to alter their liberal course and move to the right, which in practice mostly meant limiting the numbers of refugees being admitted. At the European level this move to the right is illustrated by the agreement negotiated with Turkey, according to which the latter agreed to take in refugees who refuse to apply for asylum in Greece or are ineligible for asylum within the EU. The overall aim of this agreement was to curb the influx of refugees and undocumented migrants. The same goes for the Migration Partnership Framework, which aims to handle asylum applications outside Europe, fight human trafficking, and avoid dangerous sea crossings, in which thousands of migrants have died over the previous years (Castillejo, 2017; UNHCR, 2018). However, all these measures also show that Europe is increasingly shifting responsibility to third countries, many of which—Turkey included—are already shouldering a heavier load than EU countries.

The refugee crisis is in many ways related to the European integration process itself. The will to foster peace, liberty, and economic prosperity has driven European nations closer to one another since the Second World War. As a result of intensive political cooperation, the creation of a common market and a free-travel zone, Europe has turned into one of the best places in the world to live in terms of GDP per capita and perceived quality of life. Thanks to the dominance of liberal democracy, economic growth and stability, universal health care and social welfare provisions, it has increasingly become an attractive destination for migrants. While the world has not become more migratory over the last half a century—the share of people who live in a country where they were not born has remained close to 3 percent of the global population—Europe has absorbed an ever-larger share of the world's international migrants (Czaika & De Haas, 2014). While this creates plenty of opportunities for further economic growth, it has also caused fears as national governments have partially lost control of those who enter their territory owing to the opening of borders within the Schengen area. This problem was

acknowledged long before the refugee crisis. The Schengen Treaty provides for a uniform visa system, and steps were taken to strengthen the EU's external borders. Later, Frontex was established to monitor and control the latter. The refugee crisis has shown, however, that these borders are permeable, which fuels xenophobia and racism and bolsters Eurosceptic parties.

The immigration threat is fivefold. First of all, there is a fear that Europe will be overrun by political refugees and economic migrants from developing countries, notably Africa and the Middle East. This 'invasion' notion, which has even taken hold in some academic circles (e.g., Collier, 2014; Betts & Collier, 2018), is reinforced by images of boats overflowing with refugees and economic migrants desperate to reach European shores, as well as reports on the number of migrants and refugees entering Europe that fail to contextualize the situation (cf. Lucassen & De Haas, 2017). Second, some national citizens fear that the arrival of large groups of refugees will be too costly. Refugees receive shelter, clothing, education, medical treatment, etc., while draining social welfare funds due to their low level of labor market participation. This fear is especially present in North-Western European states with a strong welfare system—rich countries which many migrants want to reach once they set foot in Italy or Greece. Third, there is anxiety that terrorists might hide among the refugees. This security threat has to be viewed in the context of 9/11, the rise of the Islamic State, and the recent terrorist attacks in European cities—Madrid (2004), London (2005/2017), Paris (2015/2016), Brussels (2016), Nice (2016), Barcelona (2017), Berlin (2016), and Stockholm (2017), the last two being committed by (rejected) asylum seekers. Fourth, there is a fear that European values might crumble: many newcomers are Muslims, and Islam is often viewed as incompatible with Western values (separation of church and state, gender equality, etc.). The mass assaults on women that took place in Cologne, Hamburg, and other German cities on New Year's Eve 2016 had a profound impact in this respect. The fifth and final fear is that refugees will turn out to be 'unassimilable elements' in European societies in the long run (Lucassen, 2005).

European countries must deal with highly conflicting forces. On the one hand globalization, free markets, and international treaties—e.g., the 1951 Refugee Convention, the Schengen Agreement and the European Convention on Human Rights—push for open borders and the welcoming of newcomers for work, study, family reunification, and asylum purposes. On the other hand, there is a desire to control and curb migration and close borders, as the unrestrained influx of immigrants weighs on welfare systems, poses security threats (there may be criminals and terrorists among them), and might create a divide between 'insiders' and 'outsiders' (Favell & Hansen, 2002). The latter

is especially true for non-Western immigrants who score consistently worse on integration scores compared to Western immigrants. Previously, these problems were mostly handled through visa policies—making it difficult or even impossible for economic migrants from developing countries to enter European territory, while keeping the Union's external borders tightly shut. This system has proved unsustainable in recent years under much increased migratory pressures, so that many member states started to act on a more individual basis. This led to divergent approaches, and a combination of short-term, mainly ad hoc measures intended to deal with immediate problems rather than develop a long-term solution. The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, a document negotiated and prepared by the United Nations, constitutes, by contrast, a long-term vision on migration policies on an international scale. The compact lists 23 objectives and commitments related to migration, highlighting migrant rights and the need for evidence-based migration policies (International Organization for Migration, 2018). Although nonbinding under international law, the compact was widely debated in several countries as many politicians feared its endorsement would stimulate migration, and criticized the compact for its lack of distinction between documented and undocumented migration. In Belgium, tensions related to the country's approval of the compact caused a collapse of the federal government in December 2018. Nonetheless, Belgium (and Sweden) endorsed this compact mere days later at the UN General Assembly, along with 150 other countries (Segers & Kerckaert, 2018).

In this chapter we will describe and compare the current immigration and integration policies of two Schengen member states: Belgium and Sweden, with a focus on economic migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees. Also, we will describe how these countries have dealt with the recent refugee crises. Subsequently, we will make a systematic comparison of migration and integration in Belgium and Sweden today, using key policy areas from the Migrant Integration Policy Index. Finally, we will make an inventory of key similarities and differences, and draw some general conclusions. The comparison between Belgium and Sweden is interesting as the latter has often been perceived as the ultimate immigration-friendly nation, with top integration scores, while Belgium scores considerably worse and the Belgian government has used a much more negative discourse on immigration, and has even launched social media campaigns to discourage potential asylum seekers from coming to Belgium.

Unless otherwise stated, we define asylum seekers as migrants who have applied for asylum and who are awaiting a decision; refugees as migrants whose asylum application has been approved; and economic migrants as

people who were in no particular danger in their country of origin and whose main motivation was to improve their socio-economic position. These are ideal types, in the Weberian sense, as economic and political motives are often mixed up in practice. Asylum seekers from Syria or Iraq who arrive in Greece or Italy, but continue their journey to North-western Europe, have in fact political and economic motives.

The Belgian case

Belgium has responded to the refugee crisis in an ambivalent way. Theo Francken, the Secretary of State for Asylum, Migration, and Administrative Simplification at the time of the refugee crisis up until the governmental collapse in December 2018, has described Belgium's policy toward asylum seekers 'as strict, but fair, [and] not too gentle'. This presupposes that the Belgian government has gone to great lengths to curb the influx of asylum seekers and economic migrants, and to return those who have no right to live in Belgium to their country of origin or a responsible third country. Francken has used tough public discourse. Concerning undocumented immigrants Francken used wording such as 'chasing them' or 'cleaning up', for instance. Furthermore, he wants to fight human traffickers and supports both the creation of asylum centers and the relocation of application procedures outside Europe as a way to end undocumented immigration. Francken has also criticized what he calls 'Europe's open border policy' as it might—in his eyes—imply the end of the Union. Moreover, he has launched campaigns on social media directed toward Iraqis to discourage them from coming to Belgium. There have been several incidents in which Francken's policy was criticized as too harsh or lacking humanity, such as the case of Sudanese refugees who refused to apply for asylum and were repatriated, after which some of them were allegedly tortured once back in Sudan. This sparked a political crisis in Belgium. Francken maintained his position, however. Public protests also arose against Francken and Belgium's interior minister Jan Jambon (also N-VA) when a Kurdish-Iraqi toddler was killed by a police bullet in the spring of 2018. The girl and her family had been removed from the United Kingdom and were chased by the Belgian police as they tried to return to the UK in a van with other transit migrants (Austin & Rankin, 2018).

The way Francken is portrayed in news media and the type of discourse he maintains seem to suggest that Belgium's immigration and integration policy is in essence a one-man show, and it suggests that a breach in Belgium's immigration and integration policy has appeared in recent years; one from

a very liberal to a very restrictive policy. However, there seems to be a large discrepancy between Belgium's actual migration and asylum policy and the way Francken and his administration frame and report on it, the latter being largely tailored for the electorate of the N-VA, a nationalist party (of which Francken is a member) which favors a strict policy on immigration. This discrepancy has been noted both by the left and the far-right (cf. Buxant, 2017). While the policy is presented as extremely strict, statistics from the Belgian Immigration Office and Fedasil, as well as reports by Myria, suggest the opposite: Belgium has become in fact more liberal toward refugees than under Francken's (liberal) predecessor, Maggie De Block. Statistics show that the refugee crisis led to an increase in first-time asylum applications in Belgium from about 1,000 in January 2014 to 6,360 in September 2016, after which a decline set in. From March 2016 on, the number of first-time asylum applications was back to its January 2014 level.

In the 2014-2016 period, most asylum applications were made by Syrians (15,540), Iraqis (10,950), and Afghans (10,760). In 2016, 63 percent of all asylum seekers were male and 37 percent female, with a clear over-representation of men in the 18-34 age category. However, distributions by ethnicity show that the over-representation of (young) males is mainly caused by some refugee groups, first of which are the Afghans (86 percent male). For the Syrians there was only a slight over-representation of men (52 percent male) among the asylum seekers, from which one may assume that many Syrians arrived with their families (Myria, 2017: 90).

The increase in asylum applications in 2014 and 2015 was considerable and required action. It was met by an increase in the number of reception centers. The figures show that the Belgian authorities made sufficient efforts to give shelter to all applicants. On January 1, 2014, reception centers had the capacity to receive 20,182 individuals, with a 73 percent occupancy rate. This number rose to 33,659 on January 1, 2016 when 96 percent of the actual capacity was in use. Subsequently a decline set in, and by January 2018 the number of openings had decreased to 23,283, of which 76 percent were in use (Fedasil, 2018). Also interesting is the evolution of the acceptance rate of asylum applications, which has increased strongly and is very high in the case of Syrians. Next, it seems that with regard to the humanitarian visa, priority was given to Christian Syrians and other religious minorities over Muslims (Myria, 2017). Moreover, there were some rescue actions, e.g., in Aleppo in 2015, which specifically targeted Christians (Decreus, 2015).

A special challenge in Belgium is caused by transit migrants who want to reach the United Kingdom. Many transit migrants used to settle in a self-constructed camp in Calais, Northern France, at a stone's throw from

the Belgian border. However, after this so-called 'Jungle of Calais' had been dismantled, security measures were taken to prevent refugees from trying to reach the UK through the port or the Eurotunnel. As a result, migration routes have shifted and Brussels' North station—from where buses depart to Great Britain—has become a new hub to embark on a dangerous trip across the English Channel. Consequently, many refugees cluster in the nearby Maximilian park and live in very poor conditions. This has led to controversy because this is happening only a few kilometers from the European institutions. While the Belgian authorities want the transit migrants to apply for asylum, the targeted group of refugees refuses as they aim to continue their journey—often facilitated by human traffickers—to the United Kingdom, while they lack legal status in Belgium. In order to solve these problems, Belgium and the UK aim to cooperate more intensively (Torfs, 2018).

In late 2018, the United Nations unveiled the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration which lists 23 objectives and commitments related to migration, highlighting migrant rights and the need for evidence-based migration policies (International Organization for Migration, 2018). The Belgian federal government was involved in its development, and initially agreed to endorse the compact at the UN General Assembly in December 2018. However, in the weeks leading up to this endorsement, majority parties clashed over the contents of the compact, as they did in several other countries. N-VA, citing issues with the compact's content and fearing a new wave of migrants, no longer wanted to endorse the compact and requested that Belgium would abstain from the vote in the General Assembly. Other majority parties disagreed with this stance, and wanted to go ahead with the earlier agreed-upon endorsement. This tension eventually led to the collapse of the Belgian federal government in December 2018. Despite this, Belgium endorsed the compact at the UN General Assembly some weeks later (Segers & Kerckaert, 2018).

The Swedish case

Sweden was one of Europe's main receivers of asylum seekers during the recent refugee crisis. In 2015, Sweden reached a historical high in the number of asylum seekers: almost 163,000 applications were made in that year (Krzyżanowski, 2018; Swedish Migration Agency, 2019). Afterwards the government took action in order to limit the influx of asylum seekers and to minimize potential negative impacts of the refugee crisis on Swedish society. Among the measures taken were the temporary reinstallation of border

checks, restrictions on the attainment of residence permits, and attempts to facilitate the repatriation of rejected asylum seekers to their countries of origin. Notwithstanding these restrictive measures, Sweden agreed in 2017 on the relocation of 2,800 refugees who applied for asylum in Italy or Greece. This underlines the willingness of the Swedish government to cooperate with other European administrations regarding migration and integration issues (Swedish Ministry of Justice, 2018).

Notwithstanding the restrictive measures taken from the end of 2015 on, the highest number of granted asylum applications was reached in 2016—due to the time-lag caused by the asylum procedure itself—when, according to the Swedish Migration Agency, 30,863 persons obtained asylum over the months of October, November, and December. In 2017, the number of granted applications started to drop and in 2018 it reached numbers (somewhat more than 10,000 for the whole year), which were actually lower than before the refugee crisis (Swedish Migration Agency, 2019).

The population composition of the asylum-seekers and refugees in Sweden resembles that of Belgium to a very large degree. The greatest numbers of refugees in Sweden are of Syrian, Afghan, and Iraqi origin. For 2016, the numbers of asylum applications for individuals of those origin countries were respectively 5,459, 2,969, and 2,758. Overall, about 60 percent of the applicants were male and some 40 percent were female. The majority of asylum seekers are young: more than half of them were below the age of 25 (Swedish Migration Agency, 2019).

Traditionally, the Nordic countries have the reputation of having generous welcoming policies toward all groups of migrants, including refugees. According to Tanner (2016) this attitude has changed to become more hostile since the rise of populist parties. In Sweden, the Sweden Democrats were founded in 1988 but were paid little attention to in the political debate for almost two decades. In the election of 2010, the party gained enough votes to become represented in the parliament with 20 of the 349 seats. Since then the party has grown in popularity and the anti-multicultural and anti-integration arguments have remained high on the party´s agenda. In the elections of 2014 and 2018, the party has consistently gained more votes, the latest outcome being that it holds 62 seats. In the most recent election, the two main parliamentary blocs gained an even number of seats, resulting in 'deadlock' for months. After four months of negotiations between parties it was clear that a new government could be approved and installed in January 2019.

Even in the years prior to the 'refugee crisis' in 2015, the increasing numbers of refugees from Syria and Iraq led to frictions in Swedish society. In August of 2014, the Swedish Prime Minister, Fredrik Reinfeldt, addressed the importance

of showing tolerance in his summer speech, a few weeks before the election: "*I know this will cause friction. I therefore call on the Swedish people to show patience and open their hearts*" (quoted in The Local, August 16, 2014). A year later, at the beginning of September, the new Prime Minister, Stefan Löfven, called for the same at a rally for refugees. For the election in 2018, opinion polls showed that immigration and integration were the main issues of concern for voters.

Since turning from being a poor country with a major emigration to North America in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to a rich country in the second half of the twentieth century, Sweden has welcomed immigrants and refugees in record numbers. Labor immigration was crucial for the country to develop and become the welfare state it has been recognized as. Back then, an ageing population was not an issue, but now it is one of the top societal challenges for Sweden and many other countries worldwide. The changing demography, due to immigration, has been highlighted as one way to meet this challenge. Integration is seen as one of the key factors in this discussion (cf. Bengtsson & Scott, 2011).

Comparing Belgium and Sweden

While the previous sections drew a more general picture of how the Belgian and Swedish governments have dealt with the refugee crisis, a more systemic comparison of the countries' immigration and integration policies will be discussed in this section. We will focus on key policy areas from the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX): family reunification, permanent residence, labor market mobility, anti-discrimination, education, political participation, health, and access to nationality. This index is a tool specifically designed to compare the integration policies of all 28 EU member states, along with those of 10 other countries (Australia, Canada, Iceland, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, Norway, Switzerland, Turkey, and the USA). Through 167 policy indicators, this index attempts to create a multi-layered picture of migrants' opportunities to participate in their new environment. Sweden, with an overall score of 78 percent at the time of the most recent measurement in 2015, is the highest-scoring country in the index. Belgium ranks 7th with a score of 67 percent (see also Table 1.2).

When breaking down the overall integration policy score by policy area, we note that Sweden scores very high on **labor market mobility**, while Belgium's score is much lower. Key aspects in this regard are the fact that in Sweden migrants can look for employment from the day they arrive as there are no distinctions made between Swedish and non-Swedish citizens in labor market

regulations. In Belgium, migrants have to obtain citizenship to gain equal rights to public sector jobs, and other regulations also restrict access to the private job market for noncitizens. Access to general support is high in both countries, but it is in terms of targeted support for newcomers that Sweden distinguishes itself from Belgium. In particular the 2009 Labor Market Introduction Act in Sweden laid out a framework which made it easier for newcomers to learn Swedish and find jobs that match their skills (MIPEX, 2015).

In terms of **family reunion**, we find that Sweden and Belgium have similar policies, as newcomers with (at least) one-year permits can be reunited with their partners. In Belgium, members of low-income groups (with an income <120 percent of minimum 'social integration' income level) are not allowed to reunite with their partners. Such an income restriction on family reunion is present in only seven other EU countries. In Sweden, a basic fee per family member is required, with lower fees in effect for refugees and permanent residents. The procedure through which reunion is decided is usually short in both countries, and family members can mount a legal challenge in case of rejection. In Sweden, spouses and adult children admitted under family reunification provisions enjoy near-equal social rights to the Sweden-based families, while in Belgium labor market integration for reunited family members is delayed (MIPEX, 2015).

Sweden has the best policy on **education** for newcomers, particularly in terms of targeting the needs of immigrant pupils and making sure schools facilitate these as much as possible. Schools also receive compensation for extra costs related to bilingual pupils. Furthermore, the Swedish government encourages schools to seize new opportunities in terms of skills that these migrant pupils bring to their education. For pupils it is sometimes possible to choose courses in their mother tongue. Belgium lags somewhat behind in this policy area, as economically disadvantaged pupils often receive insufficient support, and there are no systematic solutions to socio-economic concentration or related problems of high turnover of teachers in disadvantaged schools. A lack of evidence-based policy in this area is also notable in Belgium (MIPEX, 2015).

Neither Belgium nor Sweden scores particularly highly on **health** policy for newcomers. Both countries make efforts to ensure that all newcomers are entitled to the same health benefits as citizens, and access policies are in place to ensure migrants know about these entitlements and other health benefits. In Belgium, it appears problematic that reporting undocumented migrants is not explicitly prohibited in professional codes of conduct. Health services are only partially responsive to the needs of migrants in both Belgium and Sweden—and many other countries in the EU (MIPEX, 2015).

When considering **political participation**, we find a large divide between the two countries. Sweden ranks 7th in this area, and has slightly favorable opportunities for political participation. We note this regarding voting rights (some of the most inclusive in Europe), the strong position of NGOs, and cities' constant experimenting with new methods of democratic and participatory methods for migrants. Voting rights in Belgium are more restricted, having become open to foreigners only since the 2006 local elections. It also appears that in regional elections in Brussels, Flanders, and Wallonia, non-EU citizens do not have voting rights. The consultative bodies (that represent migrants) from Belgium are some of the weakest in Europe. Political liberties are the same in both countries, as non-EU citizens are guaranteed the right to join or form associations or political parties (MIPEX, 2015).

The policy area of **permanent residence** for newcomers is the only one in which Belgium ranks higher than Sweden, even topping all other countries. Here, EU and non-EU citizens are treated equally in their path to permanent residence, simply requiring that they have a basic income. The procedure to obtain permanent residence is often short and clear, but in Sweden there is some cause for concern as this procedure is less discretionary than in most EU countries. In both Belgium and Sweden, any permanent resident may work, study, and live in the country, enjoying the same rights as other citizens. Associated with permanent residency is **access to nationality**. Here, we find that both countries tolerate dual citizenship for both immigrants and emigrants. The eligibility standards are fairly similar, as migrants need to be long-term residents first (e.g., having lived in the country for at least five years, attained permanent residency). Following this, they must also pass 'good character' requirements and pay a basic fee. In Belgium, an additional employment requirement—one of the most demanding in Europe—is also in effect, making the path to obtaining nationality harder (MIPEX, 2015).

The final policy area under consideration in MIPEX is that of **anti-discrimination**. The definition of discrimination in both countries is fairly comprehensive, ensuring that actors cannot discriminate based on ethnicity, religion, nationality, etc. The procedures to enforce these regulations are robust, with legal aid, NGO support, etc. The Interfederal Centre for Equal Opportunities (Belgium) and the Equality Ombudsman (Sweden) are strong institutions which support victims of discrimination. In Sweden, more effort is undertaken to inform the public about discrimination, and to include anti-discrimination clauses in public contracts than in Belgium (MIPEX, 2015).

In any event, the MIPEX evaluates written policy. If the multicultural project does not run deeper than words in official documents, there is a much greater likelihood of failure (see also Michael Adams, 2017).

Similarities and differences

In the course of the twentieth century both Belgium and Sweden transformed from emigration into immigration countries. Both countries faced strong immigration in the post-war era owing to the economic boom they were experiencing. However, after some period of strong labor influx, the governments of both countries felt the urge to curb immigration; in Sweden from the mid-1960s on, and in Belgium in the early 1970s following the oil crisis (Borevi, 2012; Lesthaeghe, 2000). They were successful in reducing immigration in the short run—for some time immigration fell even below emigration—but failed in the long run. Immigration barriers turned temporary migrants into permanent migrants, and as a result of family reunification, family formation, and the influx of refugees, immigration soon started to rise again, and reached figures during the last two decades which have never been registered before (Grönberg, 2013). The recent refugee crises have added to this, but an important structural component is formed by intra-European immigration, which has gone up ever since the Schengen Zone was established and the EU was systemically extended.

Belgium and Sweden have made efforts to receive and integrate newcomers, and both countries strive for a multicultural society, which means that they prefer a salad bowl over a melting pot model (Martens & Caestecker, 2001; Tawat, 2014). This implies that in the imagined ideal society, newcomers enjoy equal opportunities, while they are able to maintain their heritage culture, religion, and identity. In both countries this ideal is only partially put into practice, and it turns out to be a far greater challenge for non-Western immigrants when compared to Western immigrants—but our systematic analysis of the MIPEX scores showed that Sweden out-performs Belgium in all domains of migrant integration, except for the field of obtaining permanent residency. Sweden scores especially well in terms of labor market integration.

The different performances in terms of migrant integration can be partly ascribed to the fact that Sweden developed a comprehensive integration policy much earlier on in the twentieth century, while Belgium kept viewing post-war immigrants as 'temporary elements' in Belgian society until the late 1970s. It was only during the 1990s that a real integration policy was being formulated, when in practice huge disparities between natives and immigrants had already come into being (Martens & Caestecker, 2001). This means that Belgium has been overtaken by events and policies developed since the 1990s aimed largely at healing old wounds, while integration policy should be forethoughtful. The late reaction of the Belgian government is a missed opportunity, but it has above all given incentives to frame immigration in a

negative way and to curb it as much as possible, although with no success. During the previous government's tenure, immigration and acceptance rates for asylum seekers have increased further, notwithstanding the strong anti-immigration discourse maintained by the Secretary of State for Asylum, Migration, and Administrative Simplification.

In general, Sweden is a more immigrant-friendly nation than Belgium, and it offers newcomers the same superb social welfare provisions as native-born Swedes. This reveals that Sweden is very generous and regards immigrants as highly valuable. This might be partially related to the fact that Sweden is a relatively large country with a small population, while Belgium is a small country with a relatively large population, but it also signifies cultural differences (Sweden aims to be a leading nation in terms of humanitarian aid and social equality), and a failure of Belgium's government to identify and use immigrants' human capital in an efficient way. More generally, immigration is framed in Sweden in terms of opportunities, while the Belgian government has presented immigration more as a challenge or even a burden. In fact, immigration can be both—an opportunity and a burden—and much depends on the willingness of immigrants to adapt to the host society, and the willingness of the receiving society—both the government and the native population—to assist them in this difficult process. This is rewarding, also economically. The better immigrants perform, for instance, in the labor market, the less they drain from social welfare provisions, and the more they contribute to the maintenance of the social system itself.

No matter what attempts from right-wing parties will be launched to curb immigration, and no matter what kind of sophisticated policy on the European level will be developed, immigration into European member states will continue as long as Europe remains safe and prosperous. It is therefore better and wiser to put the greatest efforts into the integration of immigrants and to develop policies which counteract segregation and discrimination in all domains of society. This requires a positive, open attitude toward newcomers from the receiving society, no matter what reason migrants may have had to move to the receiving country. Governments set an example for society at large by the type of policies they develop and apply, but maybe even more so by the language which politicians use in public. In this respect, Sweden cannot serve only as an example for Belgium, but for the majority of European societies. Government policy should not be guided by fear, but by thoughtfulness, intelligence, foresight, and courage.

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